For the die hard enthusiast of Japanese hobby culture

RAIJIN GAME & ANIME

雷神

STRAIGHT FROM NIPPON!

ISSUE 8

AKIBA BECKONS YOU!

THE SIGHTS OF AKIHABARA

Tokyo's electronics mecca captured in glorious color photography!

COMPREHENSIVE PROFILE OF JAPAN'S OTAKU PARADISE

Hot spots, stores, merchandise & more in Part I of our special Akiba coverage!

SPECIAL FEATURE:

AKIBA ODYSSEY 2003

Exclusive info from SEGA: Focus on games, anime, & more

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- THE "COSPLAY UNIVERSE DISPLAY BOARD"
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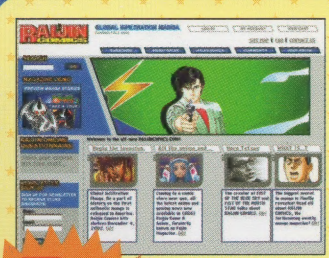

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- SUBSCRIPTION INFO
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...AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS MANGA FANS WON'T WANT TO MISS!

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RAIJIN G&A GAME ANIME

issue 8

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COVER STORY

Adorable, isn't she? The main character of anime studio Broccoli's series bearing her name, DiGiCharat, affectionally called Dejiko, brings the cover of our eighth issue to life. With *otaku* appeal like this, who could possibly deny her?

Illustrated by Koge-Donbo

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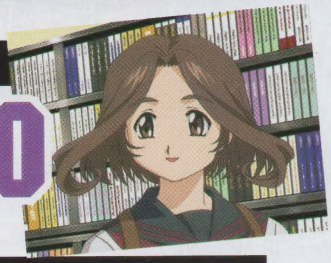

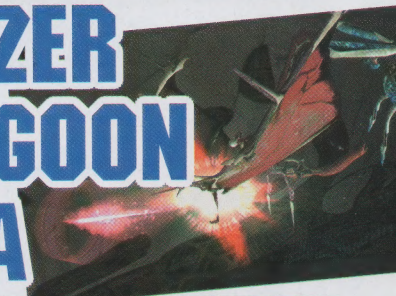

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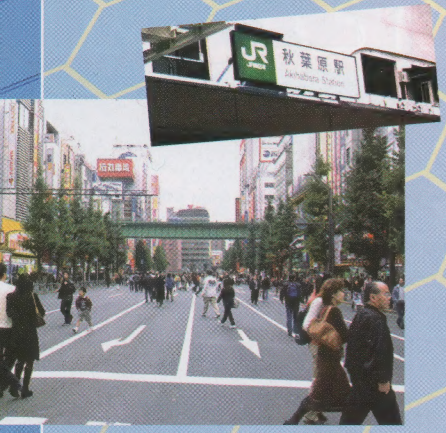
SPECIAL FEATURE

AKIBA ODYSSEY 2003

秋葉原

OUR AKIHABARA SPECIAL FEATURE SPANNING TWO ISSUES TAKES A LOOKS AT THIS EVER-MORPHING OTAKU PARADISE.



Akiba's main street – Chuo Dori. On Sundays, car traffic is blocked off, making it a giant but still crowded sidewalk.

This is Akihabara, an area that packs over 400 stores, large and small, in a 1 km^2 space. Popularly called *Akiba* (the Japanese shorten words at every opportunity), it's visited by more than 200,000 people every weekend. Annual sales in this multifaceted area top ¥500 billion – making it one of Japan's most influential sales powerhouses. It's known throughout the world as the place to go for electronic goods, as many of you probably already know (and if you don't, be sure to check out the column on p. 6).

But in the past fifteen years, *Akiba* has undergone some pretty radical changes. At the beginning of the '90s, *Akiba* changed from an electrical appliances town to a computer city, attracting growing crowds of young people. In the wake of computer software stores, shops specializing in games and video and audio software began to emerge, subsequently leading to an intensified *otaku* aura throughout the town. After the bursting of the economic bubble, sales of expensive electric appliances took a nosedive, but it was the hordes of enthusiastic game and anime fans compensating for this that caused *Akiba* to morph into a town in which such individuals gather. And now, with the *otaku* presence in *Akiba* continuing to grow even further, many stores catering to *otaku* interests have begun to spring up. From small, independent specialty shops to general outlets featuring all kinds of *otaku* goods, *Akiba* has become an uber-*otaku* city of sorts.

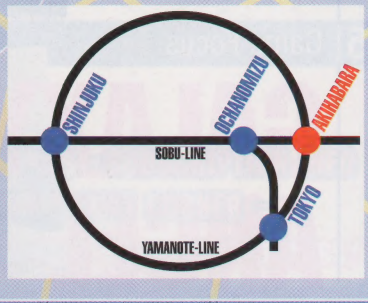
In this week's feature, we introduce a basic primer for using this ultra-dense area, concentrating on stores that are easy to find and shop at, especially those that are foreigner-friendly. If you plan on visiting Tokyo, make it a point to head on over to *Akiba* and check out the stores introduced below.

On the day we covered *Akiba*, the weather was bad, so there were fewer people than usual – but as you can see, it was still pretty crowded.

Access to AKIBA

The closest station to *Akiba* is JR Akihabara Station, two stations north of Tokyo Station on the Yamanote Line. Simply checking the station guide will keep you from getting lost.

When you get off at Akihabara Station, you'll find two exits – Higashi-Guchi and Nishi-Guchi – also called Electric Town-Guchi. You'll want to exit from Nishi-Guchi, as that's where all the *otaku* shops are. If you like mystery and WANT to get lost, use Higashi-Guchi.



Large, Multi-Modal Otaku Shops

SPACIOUS STORES FEATURE INVENTORY AND VARIETY THAT WOULD MAKE SANTA CLAUS WEEP – YOU'RE SURE TO FIND SOMETHING YOU LIKE.

01 *Akidepa* (Akihabara Department Store) FUJIYAMA

THE STATION BUILDING'S FIRST FLOOR IS OTAKU SPACE!

Considered a symbol of *Akiba*'s transformation into an *otaku* town, **Fujiyama** opened in Spring of 2002. Located on the first floor of the station building, with its sense of community and long history, **Fujiyama** is crammed with *otaku*-type goods. It's one of the best locations, the very gateway to the town, and its presence as a large general store underscores *Akiba*'s *otaku* awereness.

Inside **Fujiyama**, you'll find everything from more common goods like manga, plastic models, figures, software and character merchandise for generalists, to things for the more serious hobbyist like dolls, military goods, kits, and scale-model trains. Of special interest is "Gundam Zone," where you can find just about anything related to the "Gundam" series. Models and figures abound, and beautiful displays of "Gundam"-based goods are wating for you to discover them.

"Gundam Zone" (below) is the most popular, but other desirable products get special booths (right). There are also plenty of anime DVDs available.

02 Aso Bit City

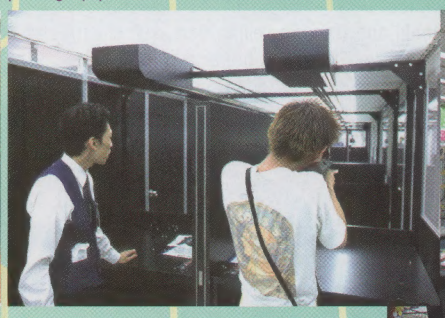
AKIBA'S NEWEST HOTSPOT – HOT OFF THE HAMMERS!

This fall, LAOX, one of Japan's largest nationwide home electric appliance stores, opened **Aso Bit City**, an all-around entertainment shop. With eight floors and total sales space of 5,000 m², it's *Akiba*'s most spacious shop. In most *Akiba* shops, goods are crammed together, but here, with plenty of space to play around with, the displays get the room they rate – no mean feat in a land with a premium on urban area*!*. **Aso** is also actively targeting the female fan base with a *yaoi*-only corner and a fashionable cafe area.

Aso features a corner for trying out new games, an airgun shooting range, and even parking space within the building*!* This place's not just for *otaku* – families and kids are also welcome. **Aso**'s opening has radically reshaped the very flow of crowds *Akiba*.

Next to the first floor entrance, you'll find the new games demo play corner. Watching other people play is both fun and educational.

The airgun shooting range features a clean-up robot that scurries around picking up pellets from missed shots.



03 Gamers

SHELVES UPON SHELVES FILLED WITH BISHOJO ANIME MERCHANDISE!

From the name, you'd think this was a store dedicated to, well, games, but it's a misnomer. **Gamers** is more of a hardcore specialty shop operated by Broccoli, the company responsible for series such as "DiGiCharat" (our cover this week) and "Galaxy Angel." Focusing on the Broccoli brand, **Gamers** features character merchandise, books, trading cards, game software, anime DVDs and more. It's now a chain operation with stores all over Japan, and *Akiba* alone hosts three entire outlets!

Gamers Store #2 and #3 are right near the station, with #1 (photo) a bit farther away to provide more window-shopping walks. Because limited items that can only be bought here are often stocked, you can spot these popular stores by the long lines forming out front.

Free PR magazines feature Broccoli goods – very useful as product catalogs.

Gamers #1 is seven stories high. Each floor features its own category of goods, like character merchandise, manga, and trading cards.

The *cosplay* coffee shop Gamers' Cafe is located on the top floor of Store #1. Expected to be waited on by cute, costumed staff members.

04 Animate

THE TRAILBLAZER OF JAPANESE ANIMATION STORES!

Animate is an anime specialty shop with over twenty years of history. In Japan alone, there are sixty branches, and last year a store opened in Taiwan. As an *otaku*-industry pioneer, **Animate** has forged excellent relationships with anime production companies, and is constantly launching its own original limited edition goods. Recently, the company has found a huge hit in its original character "Anime Tencho" ("Anime Store Manager"), designed by manga artist Shimamoto Kazuhiko.

The entrance to the Akihabara shop is somewhat narrow and inconspicuous, but once you're inside, the eight floors from the basement on up provide a wealth of space and anime goods. Of course, games, manga, figures and other cool stuff is also available.

From the very newest shows to blasts from the past, anime merchandise is **Animate**'s forte.

AKIBA columun

ELECTRONICS REMAIN IN THE MIX!

Though hard-pressed by the influx of *otaku*-centered shops, *Akiba* wouldn't be *Akiba* without traditional attractions like **Ishimaru Denki** and **Onoden** selling domestic electric appliances. Tokyoites honor a well-founded tradition – "for a fridge or air conditioner, go to *Akiba*." On Sundays, *Akiba* looks like the photo on the left, with shop clerks in *happi* coats (originally worn by festival dancers) vigorously shouting out their wares to passersbys.

Garage Kits and Figure Shops

DETAILED MODELS THAT ATTRACT BOTH THE CASUAL AND HARDCORE FAN. AKIBA IS HOME TO THE SHOP THAT REPRESENTS JAPAN'S GARAGE KIT MECCA!

05 KAIYODO

HOBBY LOBBY TOKYO

BRILLIANT DISPLAYS OF PROFESSIONALLY-FINISHED GARAGE KITS!

You recall us mentioning **Kaiyodo** before, in Issue #8. It's located on the 4th floor of Radio Kaikan, a building famous for its number of *otaku* shops. Although now considerably famous for the *shokugan* and capsule toys it produces, **Kaiyodo** was originaliy known for its garage kits. In this shop, one can find many wonderful kits and figures for sale.

Kaiyodo is more than a simple retail store it's also a **Kaiyodo** products gallery. To the delight of fans, out-of-production kits of almost legendary status as well as figures and kits remodeled by specialists are all on display. Plus, on the 2nd floor, you'll find Okashikan, a shop dealing exclusively in **Kaiyodo** *shokugan*. New products often hit the shelves here before general release, so it's always crowded.

Bishojo kits like those introduced in Issue #8 are popular, but monsters like Godzilla and Gamera and heroes like Ultraman also number among the best-selling kits. At Okashikan, dioramas exhibit *shokugan* in stunning detail (center).

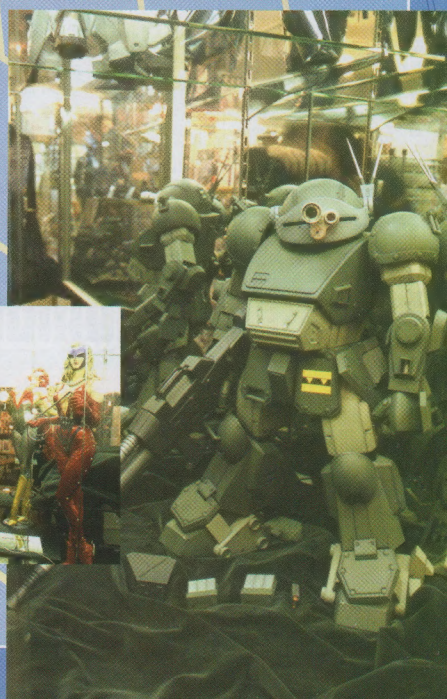
06 VOLKS

AKIHABARA SHOWROOM

THESE HARDCORE FEMALE FIGURES AND DOLLS ARE POSITIVELY MESMERIZING!

The **Volks Showroom** at Radio Kaikan features extremely high-quality garage kits, overflowing with an elegant fetishism that appeals to a hardcore crowd. Their robot and *bishojo* figures are perfection itself, but it's the erotic female figures really draw fan fascination.

As a symbol of the maniac degree of this shop, fully 50% of floor space is given over to the doll corner. Super Dollfy (bottom-left) is a jointed doll sold in parts. Exquisite glass eyes, torsos of varying proportions, faces, wigs, costumes and accessories – all these and more can be found here, on display and for sale.



Adult game character figures are cute and sexy, but figures based on Sorayama Hajime's bondage illustrations are exceptionally erotic.

RAIJIN G&A GAME ANIME

ART GALLERY PIECE #4

©Broccoli

Today's Topics

Topic #1 ANIME

PIVOTAL WORK IN THE ANIME GENRE TO BE RE-RELEASED ON DVD!

On January 1, 2003, the anime **Genma Taisen** ("Harmagedon"), first released in 1983, was released on DVD in Japan for the first time as two separate editions, a standard (¥3,800) and a limited edition (¥5,800). The limited edition includes extras such as an attractive 80-page booklet and a tinibiz figure of "Vega."

Genma Taisen is an action-packed SF anime that tells the story of the struggle between an extraterrestrial fiend "Genma" and the superheroes who must defend Earth. It's based on a collaboration between SF writer Hirai Kazumasa and manga artist Ishinomori Shotaro, both highly acclaimed in Japan. The story was later reworked into an independent novel by Hirai Kazumasa that became a major bestseller selling over 20 million copies. This was the first anime title produced by Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Co., Ltd., the publisher of the original novel that at the time had only just seriously entered the animation film market. Kadokawa Shoten Publishing later went on to produce such anime titles as "Shonen Kenya," "Kamui No Ken" ("Dagger of Kamui"), "Toki No Tabibito," and "Hi No Tori" ("The Phoenix"), and has left a significant mark in the history of anime. These titles are slated for release on DVD after February.

Genma Taisen credits start with Otomo Katsuhiro for character design. Otomo, **Genma Taisen** was the first work in which had a hand in the animation. Others who played a part in sculpting **Genma Taisen** into the masterpiece that overturned contemporary anime conventions include Madhouse on animation production and Keith Emerson, celebrated rocker of the group Emerson, Lake & Palmer, on the soundtrack. **Genma Taisen** was critical to the creative history of anime, and for Japanese fans, its release on DVD was both long overdue and marked the resurrection of this landmark.

Topic #2 TOY

REENACT THE GRIPPING SCENES THAT TITILLATED AND TANTALIZED YOU IN THE MOVIE!

A number of ambitious anime titles were released in the late '70s and early '80s that served to jumpstart the subsequent boom in anime mania. Apart from "Genma Taisen," covered in Topic #1 above, representative works include "Space Battleship Yamato" ("Star Blazers") released in 1977, "Lupin III: Castle of Cagliostro" in 1979, and "Kaze No Tani No Nausicca" ("Nausicca of the Valley of Wind"), 1984. "Lupin III" is the hit series that is often said to have broken ground for the celebrated "Cowboy Bebop" series, and "Castle of Cagliostro" is a particularly popular title that together with "Nausicca" is a representative work of director Miyazaki Hayao.

The charming characters of the "Lupin III" series will be released in March 2003 as tinibiz figures in the "Kubrick" style. This will be the second such scheduled series of tinibiz released, with the first already on sale from late December 2002. The first release included Lupin and Jigen in their trademark garb and Claris in a dress, among others. The second series will include Mine Fujiko and Zenigata in combat gear, in addition to the assault squad under Zenigata. Collecting complete sets will let you reenact any number of well-known scenes, including the climatic one in which the Castle of Cagliostro is infiltrated. Just thinking about the possibilities makes the figures' release seem painfully far off.

The figures are roughly 60 mm tall and are priced at ¥480 each, and are being produced as introductory limited edition items.

Series I

Series II

© 1983 Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Co., Ltd.© Monkey Punch/TMS NTV

Topic #3 GAME

IS A RPG SHARE MONOPOLY ON THE HORIZON? OR IS IT A NEW GAMING INDUSTRY POWER REDISTRIBUTION?

The merger between Enix and Square announced on November 26, 2002, set off tidal waves in the gaming world. we introduce the background and current relationship between these two companies, including pertinent news that likely hasn't yet made its way to the U.S.

Under the merger, one share in Square will be exchanged for 0.81 shares in Enix. For legal purposes, this makes Enix the surviving entity and Square the dispersed entity. The new company's management will include Fukushima Yasuhiro (current Enix Chairman) as Chairman, Wada Yoichi (current Square CEO) as CEO, and Honda Keiji (current Enix CEO) as Vice President.

In what was likely a move to boost confidence for future products, Enix announced on November 29th, immediately after the news of the merger, its plans for a new release in the "Dragon Quest" ("Dragon Warrior") series, "Dragon Quest VIII." The game will be released for the PS2, although release date and price are yet undetermined. The production staff includes the usual faces: Horii Yuji on scenario and game design, Toriyama Akira on character design, and Sugiyama Koichi on music. Deserving special note is that LEVEL-5, well-known for "Dark Cloud" and "Dark Chronicle," will be handling game development.

Taking a look at the period prior to the merger, Square and Enix, which includes Namco, announced on April 23, 2001 that the founders of the three companies were purchasing shares of each other's stock to "promote cooperation beyond the confines of the company while respecting each other's unique strengths." On June 18th, 2001 a partial announcement regarding specific terms of the cooperation was made stating that the three companies would found an online game management company, set up a preliminary headquarters for operations, and garner the support of Sony Computer Entertainment and NTT Communications in developing online games. When the service is started up, the three companies will offer their products there. It was also announced that Enix and Square had agreed to jointly design online games and that Namco had granted permission for use of its products in Enix publications so the three companies could jointly develop arcade games.

The merger stems from an attempt by Enix and Square to strengthen their RPG base the staple gaming genre for both companies. Enix has robust sales in Asia, whereas 40% of Square's sales are in Europe and the U.S. Enix tends to outsource the production of its games, while Square handles all of its production in-house. At the merger press conference it was stressed that the different styles and approaches of the two companies would "perfectly complement" each other and that this was an "aggressive merger," but there is little doubt that an underlying motive is to buck the current trend for their main series, "Dragon Quest" and "Final Fantasy (FF)," to constitute such a large chuck of their sales.

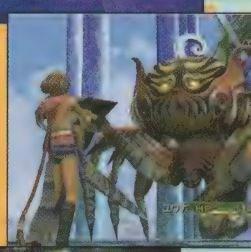
Given that the merger is between two companies with the same bread-and-butter genre, there is the risk that their sales will succeed only when "Dragon Quest" and "FF" series titles are released – essentially no different than the current situation – despite the fact that their combined share of the RPG market has increased. The question remains whether the merger will translate into steady sales across a range of genres, such as in the case of Capcom, Namco, and Sega.

Now that the two largest RPG makers have joined hands, consumers can only hope that the merger will lead to projects on the backburner being developed into exhilarating new series releases.

From "Star Ocean 3" (Mar. 2003 release)

From UNLIMITED SaGa (released on Dec. 19, 2002)

From "Final Fantasy X-2" (Mar. 13, 2003 release)



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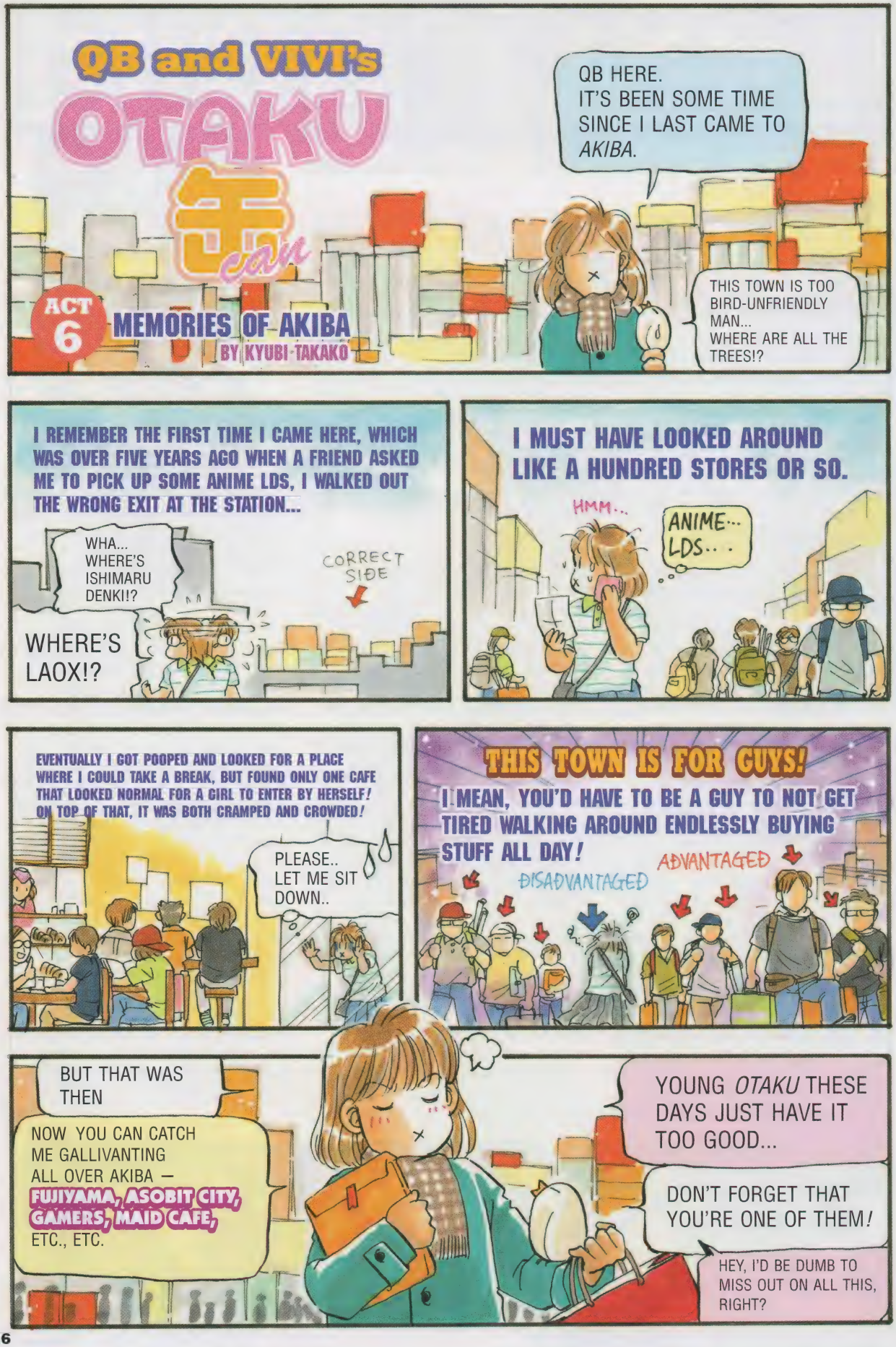

QB and VIVI's
OTAKU
ACT 6
MEMORIES OF AKIBA
BY KYUBI-TAKAKO
QB HERE. IT'S BEEN SOME TIME SINCE I LAST CAME TO AKIBA.
THIS TOWN IS TOO BIRD-UNFRIENDLY MAN... WHERE ARE ALL THE TREES!?
I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I CAME HERE, WHICH WAS OVER FIVE YEARS AGO WHEN A FRIEND ASKED ME TO PICK UP SOME ANIME LDS, I WALKED OUT THE WRONG EXIT AT THE STATION...
WHA... WHERE'S ISHIMARU DENKI!?
CORRECT SIDE
WHERE'S LAOX!?
I MUST HAVE LOOKED AROUND LIKE A HUNDRED STORES OR SO.
HMM...
ANIME... LDS...
EVENTUALLY I GOT POOPED AND LOOKED FOR A PLACE WHERE I COULD TAKE A BREAK, BUT FOUND ONLY ONE CAFE THAT LOOKED NORMAL FOR A GIRL TO ENTER BY HERSELF! ON TOP OF THAT, IT WAS BOTH CRAMPED AND CROWDED!
PLEASE.. LET ME SIT DOWN..
THIS TOWN IS FOR GUYS!
I MEAN, YOU'D HAVE TO BE A GUY TO NOT GET TIRED WALKING AROUND ENDLESSLY BUYING STUFF ALL DAY!
DISADVANTAGED
ADVANTAGED
BUT THAT WAS THEN
NOW YOU CAN CATCH ME GALLIVANTING ALL OVER AKIBA — FUJIYAMA, ASOBIT CITY, GAMERS, MAID CAFE, ETC., ETC.
YOUNG OTAKU THESE DAYS JUST HAVE IT TOO GOOD...
DON'T FORGET THAT YOU'RE ONE OF THEM!
HEY, I'D BE DUMB TO MISS OUT ON ALL THIS, RIGHT?

CLOSE-UP!

Panzer Dragoon Orta

DATA
Publisher ● SEGA
Developer ● SMILEBIT
Platform ● Xbox
Genre ● Dramatic Shooting
Release ● January 2003
Price ● US $49.95

360° PANORAMIC SHOOTING IN GORGEOUS ENVIRONMENTS AWAITS YOU!

The magnificent, entrancing world of "Panzer Dragoon" is back with a graphical, interface facelift you have to experience to believe. From the intense 360° panoramic shooting action to the mind-blowing design of the inorganic, almost mechanical dragons, the latest title in the famed series is guaranteed to blow you away on a number of levels.

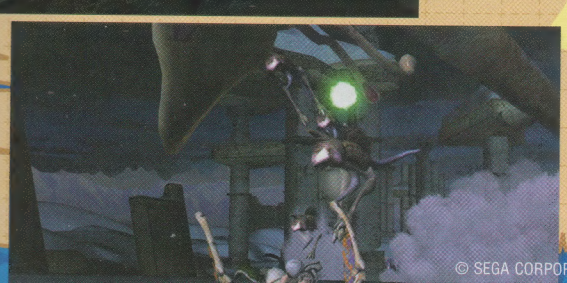
Several thousand years after the destruction of a prosperous civilization, mankind is exposed to the menace of a biological weapon of ultimate proportions that it itself created. In its desperation to eliminate this weapon and restore the human race to its proper place in the world, the "Empire" constructs a flying, living biological weapon of its own, called the "Dragonmare." Armed with these flying weapons of war, it wasn't long until the Empire found itself in the midst of a cataclysmic struggle that engulfed the land.

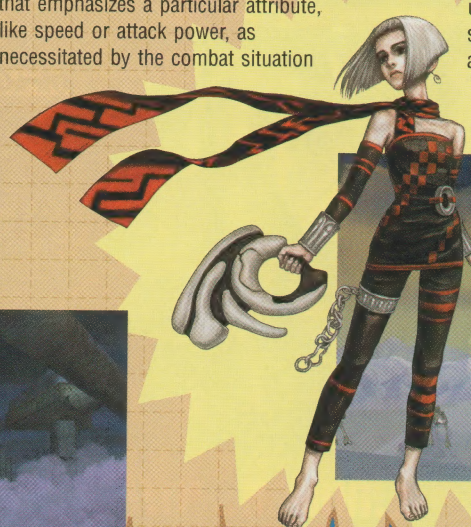
Orta, the main character in this "Panzer Dragoon" installment that marks the first appearance of the series on the Xbox platform, is a mysterious girl who finds herself a prisoner of the Empire. There, she encounters a dragon that possesses a single white horn, and it is that point that the story truly begins.

Initially, "Panzer Dragoon" made its debut in 1995 as a 3D-shooting title on the Sega Saturn. This was followed by a sequel, "Panzer Dragoon Zwei," in 1996, with the next title to take the form of an RPG with the "Panzer Dragoon Saga" title released in 1998. With this latest Xbox installment, the panoramic shooting action that the series is famous for has been elevated to new heights with the addition of a slew of new features, most notably the lock-on homing laser system used in the various mid-air combat sequences. Speaking of combat, the game promises endless intense battles pitting the player against a myriad of stage-end bosses ranging from giant airborne creatures to battleships.

To accurately shoot your enemies out of the sky and survive these fierce air encounters that make up the core of the game, delicate adjustments in speed and directional changes become absolutely essential. It is here that the new ability to transform your dragon in real time comes into play. Using this feature to morph your dragon allows you to freely alter it into one that emphasizes a particular attribute, like speed or attack power, as necessitated by the combat situation at hand. This new system incorporated in **Panzer Dragon ORTA** system, one not offered by the typical fighter-based shooting titles that dominate the genre, allows for a more exhilarating, engrossing and realized level of dogfights throughout the game.

Apart from the exciting shooting action, fans of the "Panzer Dragoon" series have been repeatedly hooked on the extra modes included in the various installments. This latest version is no exception. Thanks to the inclusion of a special mode called "Pandora's Box," the concept is taken even further by featuring of the entire first "Panzer Dragoon" title as a means of commemorating the series as a whole! This will allow players new to the "Panzer Dragoon" series to familiarize themselves with the origins of this marvelous saga. But the extra modes featured in **Orta** don't stop there. The "Film" option allows you to view all of the CG video clips featured in every Panzer Dragoon title up to this point. Selecting the "Event" mode plays an event movie based on **Orta**. Finally, selecting the "Illustration" option lets you view illustrations and CG renditions of every character in the series! Naturally, you'll need to clear a series of special conditions before unlocking these various modes, so saddle up your Dragonmare and blaze a trail of victory for mankind!





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NEXT ISSUE PREVIEW

ISSUE #9

The second half of our two-part Special Feature on *Akiba* takes you on an even deeper excursion into this area sacred to *otaku* and collectors. You won't believe some of the stuff to be dug up here!

SPECIAL FEATURE
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